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1908

Minnecotah



An Indian Legend of Lake Kampeska

By Thomas McNeill

Illustrated



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MINNECOTAH

Minnecotah, the hunter's daughter,
Lived upon the great wide prairies,
By the shores of Mirror Water,
On the banks of Lake Kampeska;
Once there came in early springtime,
To the hunter's cabin lonely,
Many braves and many squaw men,
Many women and papooses,
Many dogs and many ponies,
Came to shoot the roaming bison
As he drank the clear, cold water,
Came to hunt the deer called Fleetfoot,
As he ran among the bushes,
Came to catch the sturgeon, Nahma.
As he leaped and slowly floated
On the surface of the water,
In the pretty Lake Kampeska.

As the Indians said their "How-hows,"
To the hunter, Big Long Rifle,
From the cabin came his daughter,
Came his daughter, Minnecotah,
Bringing peace pipe and tobacco,
Came the Faun, his only daughter
Bringing words of cheerful welcome.
Then in words and many signals
Told the braves they were all welcome,
Told the squaw men they could garner
In the fields about Kampeska;

MINNECOTAH

Told the women and the children,
All were welcome to Kampeska,
To the shores of Mirror Water.

Then Long Rifle spake unto them,
Spake and lighted he the peace pipe,
Smoked awhile in intense silence,
And in silence passed it onward;
And the chiefs in turn each smoked it,
Till all had by this grave token
Said they wished to live in good will,
Live in peace with all their neighbors,
Live together as one family
On the shores of Mirror Water,
On the banks of Lake Kampeska.

In the springtime, time of planting
In the summer warriors hunting,
In the autumn came the feast time,
Came the feast time of Mondamin,
Of Mondamin, gift from Heaven,
From the Manitou, the Mighty,
To our chieftain, Hiawatha,

At the feast, Pretty Fawn, the maiden,
Came and went as did the children
Of the chiefs and of the sachems,
Came and went, nor thought of trouble,
Came and went, until the last day
When the squaw men packed the tepees
For the journey to the westward,
For the journey to the timber,
For to go to winter quarters
In the shadow of the pine trees,
In the shelter of the hemlocks,

MINNECOTAH

In the valleys of the mountains,
Safe from Kabibineka's anger.

During all the time in summer,
Many braves vied with each other,
Strove to do great deeds of valor,
Strove to throw great stones the farther
For the favor of the maiden,
For the smiles she cast upon them,
For the words of praise she gave them
For the spells she wove about them;
All this for Long Rifle's daughter
All this done for Minnecotah,
On the banks where sang the thrushes,
On the margin lined with rushes,
On the shores of Lake Kampeska.

When the lodge's poles were lowered,
When the corn was dry for moving,
When the horses all were loaded
For their long, long journey westward,
For their journey toward the sunset,
For their march across the prairies;
Many braves sought out the maiden,
Asked her to go on this journey
As the sweetheart, as the helpmeet,
For to grind the corn and make it
Into cakes and other dainties,
For to live within the wigwam
And to mind the arms and ponies.

Minnecotah this answer made them,
Made it unto them in jesting,
Made this answer to her lovers
"Unto him who in Kampeska
Throws the stones now on its margin,

MINNECOTAH

Throws the farthest from the elm tree,
Throws without the sling of leather,
Home with him I'll journey westward,
To his home among the mountains,
There to live and keep his wigwam
With him live and bear him children,
Who when grown great hunters may be,
Who may shoot just like my father,
Who may come back here in summer
Come to fish in Mirror Water,
Come to row in Lake Kampeska.

When the warriors heard her answer
When they heard what she had told them,
When her words had sunk to silence,
Each one to himself then boasted,
"I can throw beyond the others,
"I can win the pale faced maiden,
"I can win the Minnecotah."

In the future each saw her weaving,
Weaving willow mats and baskets,
Saw her making loaves of corn bread,
Saw her cooking o'er the camp fire,
Saw her in his home at evening
As she skinned the deer shot by him
As she stretched and tanned the deer skin,
And made shoes out of its leather.

Not a word was said but fiercely
Each one glared upon his neighbor,
Till their eyes glowed in their sockets,
Till their veins stood out like whip cords,
And the silence was oppressive,
And their looks grew dark with passion,
And their hands were clenched in anger,
Then the old men, the peacemakers

MINNECOTAH

Said "The Fawn speaks to you fairly,
Bids you all be brave strong warriors,
Tells you one must out-throw the others
For the honor of his wigwam
For the hand of Minnecotah,
For the mighty hunter's daughter
For the queen of Lake Kampeska.

With their war cry, loud, resentful,
To the lakeside all went running,
Anxious for the coming contest,
Anxious for the great stone throwing.
Three old men were chosen judges,
Three old men who'd outgrown passion,
Three great men whose deeds of daring
Oft were told beside the campfire,
Sung abroad by great war parties,
Told to make the young men braver
These old men were all great warriors
Who in councils had much prestige,
These great men were chosen judges
To decide which great warrior
Was to wed the Hunter's daughter;

In canoes out in Kampeska,
There the judges took their places
Took their places and then signalled
To the young men on shore waiting,
To the young warm blooded warriors,
That to each a turn was given,
Given a chance to cast the round stone
Outward in the Mirror Water
For the hand of Minnecotah,
Fairest maid of Lake Kampeska.

All day long the warriors threw stones,
Threw great stones in Lake Kampeska,

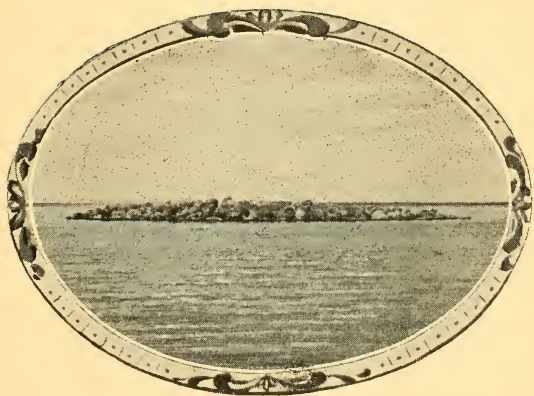
MINNECOTAH

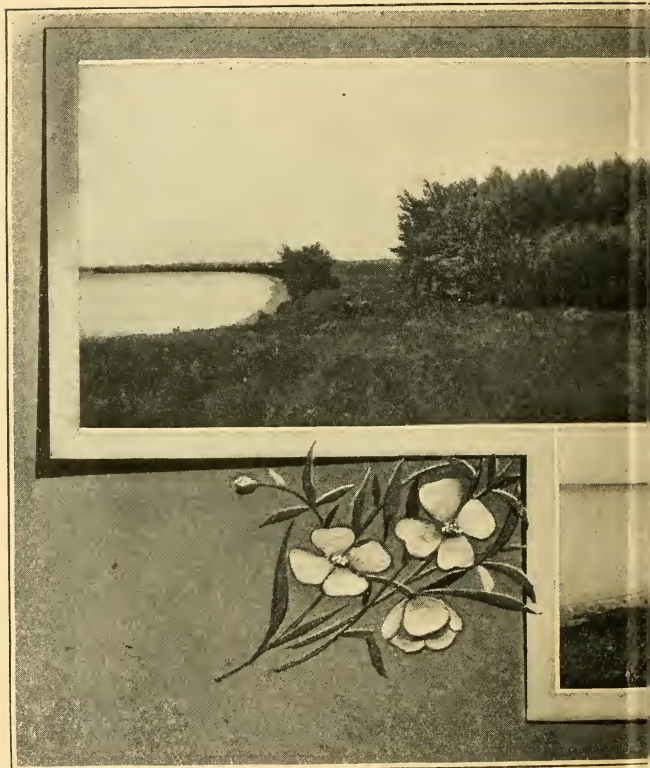
Threw until all were exhausted,
On the white and stony beaches,
Till they could no longer see where
Fell the stones cast by the warriors,
Till the night let down its curtains,
Closed the windows of the sunset,
And the stars like soldiers marching
With bright shields and burnished helmets

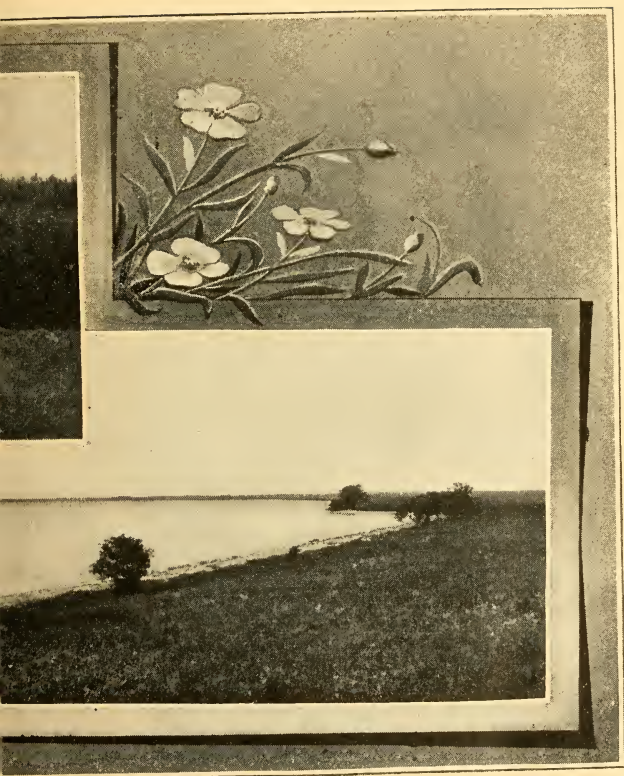
Took their places on guard duty
To hold back the evil spirits
From the couches of the warriors
On the cold and stony beaches.
Then the lovers waited, rested,
Rested only for the morrow,
Slept not but in passion dreaming
Of his victory on the morrow
When the curtains of the night time
Would uplift and let the daylight
Through the windows of the morning.

When the first gray ghosts of morning
Silent walked across the prairies
From the eastward to the westward,
From the daylight toward the darkness,
From the great sun, warming, burning,
To the realm of dew and misting,
All the braves were up for battle,
All were ready for the conflict,
All were waiting for the signal
For the great round stone throwing
For the hand of Minnecotah,
For the Hunter's pretty daughter.

Thus for three days waged they battle,
Ne'er before was seen such conflict,







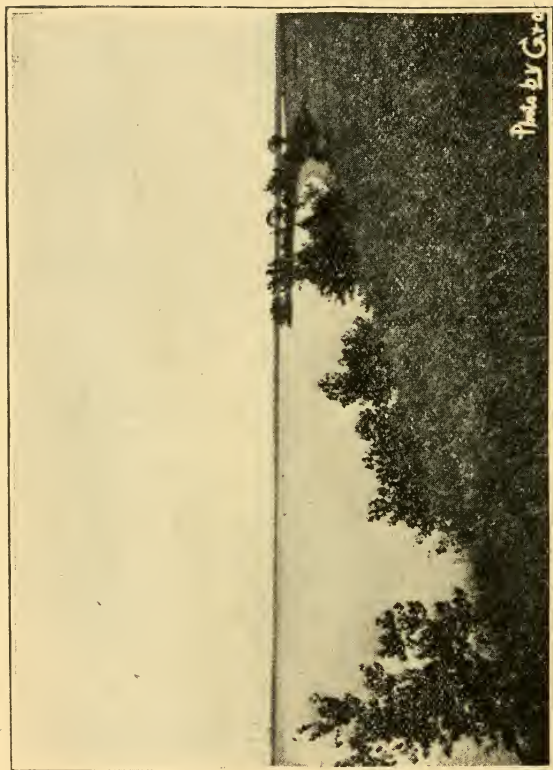


Photo by G. C. C.

MINNECOTAH

Never has been told in story
Of such prowess and such throwing;
Solid rocks were burst asunder,
Mighty rocks of sand and pipestone
From their berths in earth uplifted
Cast away and swiftly falling
With a plunge cast spray upon them.
Made great waves which rolled and eddied
Overturned the waiting judges,
Threw them over in the water
Thus they could not say which warrior
Cast the rock from shore the farthest
In the waters of Kampeska
In the waves of Mirror Water.
So they could not say which warrior
Won the hand of Minnecotah.

Gradually up from the bosom
Of the fair Kampeska water
Rose a pile of stones and higher
Rose the water of the lakelet,
Rose until it o'er flowed the margin
Driving back the toiling throwers,
Drove them back, with anger blinded,
Drove them back with hearts a-burning
From the beach where lay the round stones
From the contest half completed,
From the hand outstretched to greet him
Who should throw a stone the farthest
Out into the crystal water
Out into Lake Kampeska,
When the old man saw the anger
On the faces of the young men,
Saw the bitterness and the hatred
Each one had toward all the others,

MINNECOTAH

Saw that evil strife was threatened
Unless something cooled their anger,
Seized the maiden, Minnecotah,
Out into the lake they took her,
On the pile of stones they placed her,
On the stones thrown by the warriors,
Telling her unless some warrior
She would wed of their election
She should on this little island—
Made by castings of her lovers—
Stay until her flesh was withered,
Stay until she died of hunger,
Died of hunger on the island
Made of stones the braves had thrown there
On the isle in Mirror Water,
On the island in Kampeska.

How the Fawn lived on this island,
How her life was spared each evening,
By the Manitou, the Mighty,
How the food was brought unto her,
By the Manitou, the Mighty,
Is a tale that's oft repeated
By the campfires, in the wigwams
Of the Indians, now gone westward
To the wildlands of the mountains
Where the deer and bear are many,
Where the trout leaps in the water
As it falls and tumbles downward
From the melting snows of springtime:
It is told sometimes in sadness
By the braves who once contested,
For the maid, Long Rifle's daughter
On the banks of Lake Kampeska,
On the shores of Mirror Water.

MINNECOTAH

When the night let down its curtains,
Closed the windows of the sunset,
Hid the island in the water
From the watchers on the mainland,
Then the Manitou, the Mighty,
Sent unto the isle some fishes—
Blinded for a time it seemed so—
Drove them to the stony island
Held them there for Minnecotah,
Held them there until the lone one
Caught and slyly hid about her
Several fishes for the morrow,
For her hunger on the morrow,
When the hours seemed the longest
For the Fawn, the hunter's daughter,
As she lived upon the island
In the center of the water
In the waters of Kampeska.

Minnecotah had a lover
Who had gone unto the sunset,
There to seek for gold and silver
E'er he took her to his log house,
E'er he married Minnecotah.
Many moons since he had left her
Circled thru and still he tarried,
Many moons had passed between them
Yet she waited for her lover
Who was far out to the westward.
At this time while coming homeward
With his pack well filled with silver
And a precious bag of gold dust,
Heard he rumors of her trouble
Heard her life was great imperilled

MINNECOTAH

By a death of slow starvation
On the island in the water,
By the Indians surrounded
In the center of an island
In Kampeska's crystal water.

Swiftly home across the prairies
Rushed her lover, fiercely chiding,
Blamed himself for all her trouble,
Moaned in anguish at her peril
Till he reached the fair Dacotahs
Saw the gleaming of the waters
Saw the island, saw the Indians
Saw the maiden, sitting lonely
On the stones sat Minnecotah,
Sat the pale faced hunter's daughter.
Creeping slowly to the margin
Saw the guards and then the campfires,
Saw the birch canoes and paddles,
Noted that he could get to them,
Made his plans the Fawn to rescue,
Bore her off all in the night time
To his lodge among the timber
Far, far from the haunts of Indians—
Leaving them to guess and murmur
At the Minnecotah's disappearance.

When the night time was the darkest
When the campfires burned the brightest,
When the laugh and jest were lightest,
Forth he stole from 'neath the elm tree,
On the margin of Kampeska,
Launched the light canoe of birch bark
Paddled to his sweetheart waiting,
Bore her off into the darkness,

MINNECOTAH

Took her far from Lake Kampeska
From the Indians who had loved her
From the place of her great peril
From the island in the center
Of the pleasant Mirror Water,
Took the hunter's only daughter
From the shores of Lake Kampeska,

In the morning when the watchers
Gazing out across the waters
Saw no more the Minnecotah
Saw no more the hunter's daughter
Saw no more the Fawn a-weeping,
Loud they wailed in consternation,
High above the cry of eagle
Rose their cry of lamentation.
Then the wisemen smoked and whispered,
"She has gone across the river
To the white-face, Great-All-Father,
To the place of song and laughter
In the land of the Hereafter.

Straightway from the fair Kampeska,
Silent went the sorrowing people
To the land far to the westward
To the haunts of deer and bison
In the shelter of the pine trees
In the wild lands of the mountains.
Never since have come these warriors
In the time of budding flowers
To the shores of Lake Kampeska;
For the spirit of the maiden
Of the Fawn, the hunter's daughter,
Of the fairest Minnecotah

MINNECOTAH

Hangs and broods above the water,
Whispers in the elmtree branches
Sobs and cries among the bushes
On the margin of Kampeska.

Yes her voice is heard by lovers
Who are on the lake at sunset,
Who are walking in the shadows
Of the sighing moaning elmtrees,
Who are idly tossing pebbles
In the waters of Kampeska.

To the skeptic, to the doubter,
Let me speak a word of warning
E'er you say "Tis idle chatter"
E'er you taunt, "'Tis only squaw talk'
E'er you murmur "It is nothing
Nothing more than leaves a-rustling
Nothing more than waves a-lapping
On the pebbles, or the branches
Clashing one against the other."
Let me say "'Tis Minnecotah
Telling all to not be triflers
For in trifling there is trouble
Such as happened in the old time
On the isle in Mirror Water
In the lake of Fair Kampeska."
If you doubt my story children,
Go and look out from the margin
Look and see where Minnecotah
Sat and wept upon the island
Isle of stones in Lake Kampeska
In the land of great wide prairies
By the lake called Mirror Water.

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